

# A Picture of Health

## In focus this month: Sexual Health

In Public Health we look at the way people in Tameside live as a whole population. This helps us understand what the main health and wellbeing challenges are for people living here, so we can look for ways to improve levels of health. We'll be sharing facts and figures about health in Tameside with you every month, to put you in the picture. We'll also be giving you information on how you can help yourself and the people around you to live well.

**1** When talking about Sexual Health, infections, Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinics and contraception may spring to mind, but let's not forget that sex is enjoyable and has many benefits for your health and wellbeing. For starters, it burns around 80 to 100 calories and counts towards the recommended levels of physical activity for an adult. Sex can be a virtuous cycle as certain activities like pilates or yoga, both can increase hormone levels, blood flow and strengthen pelvic floor muscles. That's not to mention what it can do to keep you flexible!



**2** Sheep's intestines, crocodile dung, and Pennyroyal Tea. Contraception has come a long way since our ancient ancestors who relied on the herb garden and nature to control birth. Nowadays there's a plethora of choices, from injections and implants, to coils and condoms. It is important to know the different options available, so you can make the best choice. The Family Planning Association have pieced together the different available methods of contraception and weighed up the pros and cons. Remember only a condom can protect you from sexual transmitted infections.



**3** It's a myth that older people no longer want or need a sex life. Your sex life might change as you get older, but that doesn't mean it has to be any less fun! However, sex in later life may be difficult and especially daunting if you are considering a new sexual relationship after a divorce or bereavement. Even with your partner, as you may be experiencing physical changes which affect your ability or desire for sex. It's important to remember, that you won't be the only person with these worries and there is lots of tips to help with a good sex life.



**4** For younger people who may just be starting out in the world of sex and relationships there are a number of things to think about first, not just how to 'get it right'. Whilst they might already know how to protect themselves against infections or an unwanted pregnancy, there are risk factors like alcohol and drugs that can affect their judgement and ability to put that knowledge into action when the situation arises. Sexual consent is simple – no means no but it can get complicated...it's like asking someone if they want a cup of tea. Watch the video to find out more.



**5** Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs) don't care about your sexual history - you can get an infection on your first or 100th time, so it's vital we know the facts. STIs can be passed on through unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex, by genital contact and through sharing sex toys. You might think that it would be obvious if you or a sexual partner has an STI but often they don't have any signs or symptoms (or they might not appear for weeks). For both men and women STI tests are often quick and easy and could include giving a urine sample, visual examination to look for signs of infection, having blood taken, or using a swab on the genital area. You can order a test kit to use at home or visit the Northern Sexual Health at The Orange Rooms.



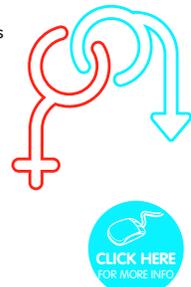
**6** Booze might seem like great fun on a night out, but it can become a serious buzzkill in the bedroom. Drinking too much over an extended period of time can turn a temporary condition like 'brewer's droop' into full-blown impotence. Erectile dysfunction can be a longer term problem, and is far more common than you may think. At least one in every 10 men are affected at some point in their lives. Erection problems are linked to physical health such as heart disease and high blood pressure or diabetes, all of which are preventable through a good diet and an active lifestyle.



**7** Can I have sex while I'm pregnant? Most parents-to-be worry about this, but if you have a normal pregnancy, there is no reason why you can't. If there are any concerns, your midwife will inform you to avoid sex. However, it is normal for your sex drive to change during pregnancy. Don't worry about this, but do talk about it with your partner or try a different position for comfort if that is an issue.



**8** Alcohol can affect fertility for both men and women. A study showed drinking between one and five drinks a week can reduce a woman's chances of conceiving, and excessive alcohol lowers testosterone levels and sperm quality and quantity in men. Weight gain associated with excess alcohol also means that obese men have lower circulating testosterone and the hormones involved in the reproductive system are negatively affected for obese women. If you are trying to conceive, or think you might want to in the near future, consider cutting right back, to give your body the best chance to bloom. It's always a good idea to track the amount of alcohol you drink, download the One You Drinks Tracker.



**9** Alcohol reduces inhibitions and affects decision making abilities, especially when it comes to sex. At the lighter end of the scale it could mean that the person you thought was a hottie turned out to be a grotty when the beer goggles came off. The more you drink, the less careful you are though, and it can have serious consequences when it comes to sex and your personal safety.



**10** Chlamydia is the most commonly diagnosed bacterial sexually transmitted infection in England, with rates substantially higher in young adults than any other age group. It causes avoidable sexual and reproductive ill-health, including symptomatic acute infections and complications such as pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), ectopic pregnancy and tubal-factor infertility. The National Chlamydia Screening Programme (NCSP) recommends screening for all sexually active young people under 25 annually or on change of partner (whichever is more frequent). FREE test kits are available from RU Clear.



**11** Gay men, lesbians and bisexual people have the same health needs as straight people. However, research shows that people with same-sex partners may have a higher risk of contracting certain conditions. For instance lesbians receive less routine health care than other women, for example missing breast and cervical cancer screening tests for reasons including fear of discrimination and negative experiences and gay men are at a higher risk of HIV. NHS Choices provide lots of information for LGBT people's health and wellbeing including sexual health and mental health. Greater Manchester PaSH (Passionate about Sexual Health) also provides lots of information and advice on sexual health, HIV and contraception.



**12** HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Once in the body, and left untreated, the virus weakens the immune system by attacking the cells that help the body fight off infections and diseases. Sadly, there is no cure or vaccine for HIV. With early diagnosis, HIV is now a treatable chronic manageable medical condition. Knowledge of HIV status increases survival rates, improves quality of life and reduces the risk of HIV transmission. Transmision of HIV can be prevented by the use of condoms during sexual activity which carries the highest risk. For a free and confidential test either visit Northern Sexual Health at The Orange Rooms or order a home testing kit.

